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Prof speaks at Rwandan symposium on victims of mass displacement

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Professor Dilanthi Amaratunga speaking at Rwandan symposium

Professor Dilanthi Amaratunga was invited to speak by the organisers the RAE, Academy of Medical Sciences, the British Academy and the Royal Society

WITH millions of people being driven from their homes by factors such as extreme weather, climate change, civil unrest and armed conflict, leading experts in fields rare from engineering to medicine have assembled in Africa to discuss the causes and how to meet the challenge of improving the lives of the victims of mass displacement.

The event was a three-day symposium that took place in Rwanda, organised by the UK's Royal Academy of Engineering, with the Academy of Medical Sciences, the British Academy and the Royal Society. It was titled *Inclusive Prosperity and Wellbeing in the Context of Mass Displacement*.

Dilanthi Amaratunga (<https://research.hud.ac.uk/ourstaff/profile/index.php?staffid=1170>), who is Professor of Disaster Risk Management and Reduction at the University of Huddersfield where she jointly heads its Global Disaster Resilience Centre (<https://research.hud.ac.uk/institutes-centres/gdrc/>), was invited by the Royal Academy of Engineering to chair the symposium. The aim of the event was to assemble 60 of the world's leading early and mid-career researchers to address the challenges caused

global mass displacement. The event focussed on what drives mass displacement – disasters, conflicts and climate change – the pressures that are created by it and how we can prevent it, adapt to it, and work towards better inclusion of displaced persons into society.

Professor Amaratunga gave a keynote address to the assembled experts in which she produced facts and figures which showed how the scale and pace of migration and displacement had accelerated. In one year alone, extreme weather drove more than 32 million from their homes.

“Mass displacement is not a new phenomenon, but with protracted conflict situations and increasingly intense and frequent climatic extremes, as well as slower-onset hazards linked to climate change, it is becoming a more frequent phenomenon,” she said.

“To understand and work towards solving the challenges caused by mass displacement, it’s important that we understand its root cause. Natural disasters, war and conflict and climate change all force people to leave their homes. Identifying the scale and impact of each of these triggers is essential for developing effective and clear policy actions to help vulnerable people and populations.”

Professor Amaratunga added that the creation of a symposium that enabled researchers from across the world to work together meant there was a much better chance of addressing the complex issues arising from mass displacement.

The Rwanda symposium – co-chaired by Professor Dame Henrietta Moore, Director of the UCL Institute for Global Prosperity – assembled researchers from engineering, social sciences, natural sciences, humanities, biomedical sciences and medicine.

Professor Amaratunga commented that: “Our symposium had a structure for promoting innovation, particularly for providing interdisciplinary exposure. A major component came from embedding the participants in an interdisciplinary programme. For interdisciplinary work to thrive, a culture which promotes a shared vision, customs, values, understandings and relationships need promoting and with this in mind, each session was focused on a sub-topic of the overarching theme, with relevant experts chairing the sessions to lead discussions.

The event was the first *Frontiers of Development* symposium in a series that is based on the Royal Academy of Engineering’s established *Frontiers of Engineering for Development* series.

Professor Amaratunga has had the privilege of leading some of the most distinguished and influential international networks and committees. She is the chair of the United Nations Working Group on Construction Policy and Practice with 85 international academics, researchers, practitioners and policy makers.

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